

Inside Report . . . By Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

LBJ and the Peace Bloc

Part 1

THE VERY private romance between President Johnson and his waspish Democratic critic, Sen. Wayne Morse of Oregon, is symbolic of a new LBJ approach to the peace bloc partly growing out of pressures from the hawks.

Of all the President's opponents in Congress on the war in Viet-Nam (not to mention foreign aid) Morse has made the most noise. Since the beginning of the new romance three weeks ago, however, he has been discreetly silent — an unusual condition for Morse, directly attributable to the President's courtship.

The latest confidential chat between the President and his number one Viet-Nam critic came last Thursday. That tete-a-tete followed at least two others, one of which was unusually long even for Mr. Johnson, who has been known to miss lunch entirely rather than break off an interesting dialogue.

Another in the series of Johnson-Morse rendezvous was a group affair, in which the President singled out Morse for special attention.

TO APPRECIATE the significance of the new glow of warmth between the President and critic Morse it must be understood that Mr. Johnson has seen all too few Senators lately. One ripe source of complaint on Capitol Hill these days is that the President seems to have gone suddenly incomunicado — even with old Senate allies.

But arch-critic Morse is

obviously exempt from the temporary presidential withdrawal. So is another, milder critic of LBJ abroad — Sen. J. William Fulbright of Arkansas, the scholarly, prestigious chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Before Fulbright's speech on Viet-Nam June 15, Mr. Johnson called the Senator to the White House.

In their talk, Mr. Johnson asked Fulbright specifically if he would not catalogue in his speech all the efforts that the Johnson and previous administrations have made to negotiate a settlement in Viet-Nam.

Not only did Fulbright agree to do this. He also told the Senate he "approved" the Johnson policy of strengthening South Viet-Nam during this dangerous period of the monsoons.

This suggests that President Johnson is now once again trying to disarm his critics, as he disarmed them last April with his speech in Baltimore pledging "unconditional discussions" to end the war.

BUT BEYOND that, it also suggests that the President senses that a new relationship between the White House and the anti-war bloc in the Senate is now particularly necessary for him.

During his talk with Fulbright, the President went out of his way to say how glad he was that Fulbright was going to make a speech about the war.

The war hawks in the Defense and State Depart-

ments, he told Fulbright, were pressing hard to escalate the war beyond the point the President was willing to go. Their vehemence was growing in direct proportion to South Vietnamese failures on the ground. A speech by Fulbright emphasizing negotiations, Mr. Johnson suggested, would relieve him of some of this pressure.

This was precisely the kind of speech Fulbright made. Accordingly, instead of exiling the band of critics who have been sniping at his Southeast Asia policy, President Johnson has found a way to exploit them.

For example, one of the shrillest of the critics has been Sen. Frank Church of Idaho. In a major speech last week, Church went far out of his way to praise Mr. Johnson as "a man of peace . . . working ceaselessly to restore peace." Not coincidentally Church was with the President on Air Force One last Thursday night winging out west to San Francisco.

But Mr. Johnson has no intention of giving the peace bloc what it really wants: Virtual surrender in Viet-Nam. Thus, how long Mr. Johnson may be able to restrain the more violent criticism, such as Sen. Morse's earlier diatribes, is anyone's guess.

What is clear is that the President seeks to quiet down the Wayne Morses just at the point that the United States approaches maximum danger in the paddies and provincial towns of Viet-Nam — a point of maximum pressure from his generals to further escalate the war.

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